1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

E. Gestures and Postures.

201 Meaningful gestures accompany speech quite often among Amhara, occasionally substitute for speech, though not often. Amhara is too proud of ability for self-expression to forego speech in any but sharp dominance-subordination situations, in which case he may resort to non-verbal signs.

Gestures may take the form of signs, signals or symbols, and often emphasize status domination, e.g. noble versus commoner peasant; or patriarchal versus younger generation; or master toward servant.

To symbolize affect, the dominant person may lift part of his toga off his own body and cover the head and shoulders of the subordinate, e.g. a younger person, or a female. This gesture symbolizes protection, shielding, expressed as "gashey" (my shield). Affect can also be symbolized by the "gursha" (described earlier).

201 695 Formal antagonism appears most clearly in court "before the judge" ("badarya fit"). When appearing on the stand, the speaking adversary folds his toga so that he has an ample piece of cloth available to wave in the face of the silent adversary, and, to emphasize his protest and revolt against injustice, even in the face of the judge until restrained. He may raise his "wager" to emphasize the justice of his case and his certainty as to the outcome; using the following signals:

"I bet honey" - by licking his palm,

"I bet a horse" - extending arms and waving hands to imitate gallop,

"I bet a mule" - by raising hands to ears, indicating long ears of a mule, and moving them up and down.

The judge carefully notes the wagers in his book, since he will receive the wager of the loser, and, except for a "tax" to the governor, can keep most of it, in the old tradition.

201 675 196 Symbolism in commerce serves to give legal validity to a trade agreement, since bystanders thus become witnesses. When buyer and seller agree, the right hands are waved up and down, which attracts attention, then palm touches on palm (with fingers stretched away). This may or may not be reinforced by the verbal oath "Hayle Selassye yemut" (May the emperor die, if I lie). This commercial symbolism is followed especially in important transactions, such as livestock.

201 196 Symbolism in political life takes the form of rythmic handclapping, ("anchchätächchäbä"), not to be confused with Western applause. It is performed as a greeting, as acknowledgement of superordination. It does not follow public proclamation. These are greeted with respectful silence, but women may indicate actual or pretended joy with their joyshout "ellel". Amhara public opinion ("astäyayät") sometimes signals negative reaction to official proclamations by "murmuring" in a delayed stage-whisper, and though officialdom traditionally pretends to ignore public opinion, it usually employs paid listeners who mix with the public to trace any "murmuring" to its sources. For, in the past, ignored murmurings frequently led to rebellions.

Anger, whether silent or accompanying verbal battles, is signalled by wide opening of the eyes ("afättätä"), or a furious, intent stare ("täfattätä").

201 Directional signs are made by moving eyelids and eyelashes, particularly by nobles or persons imitating their subtle ways. To communicate "get rid of this person", I want to talk to you alone", the eyelids wink up and down ("taqqäsä"); to signal "come out of the hut, I want to talk to you outside", the pupils and eyelashes work in the direction of the door. Men may give such signals as frequently as women.

201 177 The signal of expressing desire to enter consists of knocking with the entire fist ("koräkkoni" - onomatopoetic). Finger-knocking

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[177] has been introduced only since the Italian occupation.

The gesture indicating sour-bitter taste (which are not differentiated; and collectively called "märara"), consists of slowly shaking the head sideways ("täṅgäshäggäshä"); sometimes reinforced by the verbal exclamation of pain, "ayye" or "hayy!".

516 Postures differentiate between the status of the master and that of the servant. The master indicates his "free" status by sitting way back on the stool or bench, straight, in a position which would require special effort to rise and therefore emphasizes that he does not expect to have to jump up at anyone's command. A servant may not sit in presence of the master, or must sit lightly so as to be ready to perform any duty for which he may be called upon at any moment. To indicate respect, a servant carries out his duties on the run (as "on the double" in the Western armies), while the master is present.

The correct posture in sitting is called "kurkum alä", sitting "folded up": the legs bent at the knees, the feet far back and partly hidden, since it is "rude" to sit with legs stretched out beyond the knees. But the thighs may be spread, especially when seated on a mat on the ground, even in the case of peasant women who wear the anklelength, heavy cotton gown. To sit with legs crossed (Turkish fashion) is frowned upon as the posture of "barya", the Muslim or "pagan" ex-slaves from the Sudan; considered a rude and lazy position by the Amhara. The proper posture of the Amhara, if seated on the ground, is a squatting position, on the hips, never on the heels; feet flat on the ground, knees high and spread, the toga arranged so as to cover the knees and shins even when jodphurs are worn.

201 554 Facial expression of a high-status Amhara (noble, priest, elder) assumes a stoic appearance. The jaw muscles are relaxed, the mandible slightly dropped, the eyes half-closed but alert, breathing very quiet,

[195] the voice in even tone (in contrast to the strident whine of the argumentative peasant-gabbar).

201 554 argumentative peasant-gabbar). The body expresses almost the permanence and immobility of a status, as if the high-status person could not be surprised or dismayed by anything, certain that all things due him will come to him.

516 The famous "Nilotic stance", stork-like, in which the person stands on one leg, resting the foot of the other against the inner knee of standing leg, is found in the Amhara only among young boys, and an occasional, low-class adult.

554 481 In walking, nobles of the old school walk slowly, somewhat heavily, as if in formal procession. Members of their retinue carry their cane, overcoat, etc. By contrast, laborers carrying heavy burdens walk catlike, largely on the instep, and fairly fast.

F. The Language of the Toga ("shamma").

201 291 The toga is used in so many different, formal ways by the Amhara to express moods, occasion and social status in the presence of persons of differing social status, that the language of the shamma has been likened to the "language of the buffalo robe" of the Plains Indians of America (footnote 95).

The most common way of draping this usually 6 ft. long, 2-1/2 ft. wide garment can be described as "out-going"; called "tälabbäsä"; The toga is draped around the upper body so that it gives a turtleneck effect, the embroidered border extends from the shoulder to the waist. This may indicate that the young wearer is in an out-going, expansive mood, considers himself a gay blade going into town in a holiday mood; when worn this way by an older man, it expresses that he is a sober, respectable citizen, in an optimistic mood, going to meet persons of equal status.

Footnote 95 - Coon, C. S.: Measuring Ethiopia, 1935, p. 116.

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291 To express a sad mood, the toga is not draped, but let hang full length, a corner even trailing in the dust, another corner slung across the front over the opposite shoulder, and the wearer walks with eyes sadly downcast. This way of wearing it is called "ashnäffäta", cloaking the body from the neck down. The method of careless cloaking symbolizes that the wearer is unhappy, depressed, overcome with the sadness of life.

To express reserve, the person who feels himself superior in the presence of people whom he considers inferior, or strangers, can emphasize his dignity by lifting the turtleneck effect of his draped toga to cover his mouth. This form is called "genteb täkanannobä", connoting pride, so that persons who act proud beyond their station are criticized by this term. But in the presence of strangers, who might be carriers of "bäda" (evil spirits, evil eye), which might penetrate into the body through the mouth, this is considered excusable.

To emphasize an even greater degree of reserve, the top part of the toga may be lifted further to cover the nose also. This is called "kofännana", and a man who makes too frequent use of it is criticized as "abba kofenanë" (lit. father of too much pride); it is also called "täshkärakkära" (lit. veiling), for only the eyes are left free. This prevents evil spirits from entering through the nostril, while the eyes are regarded as potentially offensive weapons, not vulnerable. This form indicates great superiority, and is therefore limited to men; an occasional woman doing this would be sharply mocked as "mentally unbalanced", unless she walks with her husband who is thus attired, imitating him, e.g. while passing through a strange neighborhood, draped for protection ("täconattäfa"). It signals "keep your distance", "don't touch me".

To express great respect, when in the presence of a "great man", (e.g. when appearing formally before a feudal lord, in the old days,

201 among rustics still today), the toga is draped so that the upper part
291 of the body is bare or at least not covered by the toga, while the corner flaps may rest on the slightly raised forearms, possible accompanying the begging gesture of the outstretched palms; this is called "awwärarrädä" (possibly from "wordä", district lord to whom one reports). Combining respect with utility, dancers (azmari) often drape this way, since much of the Amhara dance is upper-body, thus left disentangled, and enabling the dancer to lift the loose corners while swaying in tempo of the musical accompaniment.

Before the judge ("bädanya fit"), the toga is partly draped as in respect, with the difference that one corner is left as large as possible; to enable the wearer to shake an accusing toga-corner in the face of the adversary while on the witness stand, or in protest toward the judge while loudly praying that heaven may give "light" to the judge, or while raising one's wager as to the outcome.

When going to church ("beta kristyan") the toga flaps are draped across the chest so that, in crossing to the opposite shoulder, they form the sign of the cross. When on the way to the house of the great man, this drape is used, for then the flaps can be dropped on the forearms, in the gesture of respect, without draping.

Women usually drape the toga so that part of the shamma acts as a skirt-apron ("sherret"). When in an "out-going" mood, the other part of the shamma covers one arm (usually the left) and the other shoulder. When at work, the top flaps are slung over the chest, leaving both arms completely free for work ("asharrätä").

291 Besides these expressive drapes of "language of the shamma", there are several utilitarian ways of draping it which communicate merely the work being done at the time, or represent mere patterns of draping for comfort:

291 Men doing physical labor - "boddäna" - lift toga above shoulders to free arms;

- "adägaddäga" - knot toga across chest; wrap-around. (also to tie shammas of debtors to creditors, or prisoners to guard's).

[411] To parry blows - "mäkäta" - wrapping toga around left forearm, as shield.

Preparing for battle - "adägaddäga" (see above): knotting shamma across chest, after wrapping it tightly around the waist.

When cold - "zeqzeq läbbasä" - doubling a heavy shamma (called "kuta" or "derreb") to wrap oneself in completely, even covering covering head, at night.

When hot - a light shamma of muslin ("nätala") may be rolled around the head - "tämättämä". Hence, the turban of priests is called "mätamtamiya", a tight wrap-around of the head by muslin.

[535] When dancing - before "däbtära" (scribe-choristers) begin to dance, in church, they first drape the toga tightly ("shäbäsh-shäbä"), so that the flaps will not drop from the shoulders during the motion.

[765] In mourning - while dancing the funeral motion, accompanying the improvised eulogy, women approach each other holding their own togas outward and horizontal, like huge wings, (as if they were holding a spear like men dancing the "fukkara" boast dance).

201 291 178 685 Some of these expressive ways of draping the shamma are falling into disuse in the towns where the people are more affected by what passes as "modern dress". However, an interesting increase in one way of draping the shamma can be noticed in recent years: Now that debtors are no

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longer chained to creditors, more frequent knotting-together of the shamma is taking place, instead.

G. Dance, Chant, Musical Instruments.

535 Amhara dancing falls into three categories: religious dancing, military dance, and the entertainment dance performed by professionals. The first type has already been described in the section on the church.

Military dancing falls into two main categories: the "fukkara" boasting dance accompanied by boasting chant; and the "hotu" loyalty dance accompanied by shouts.

The "fukkara" is the war-boast, before or after battle, and on other occasions, of the individual warrior boasting of himself, sometimes of his kin group. It used to be danced with a spear, now with a stick or rifle. This is held horizontally over the shoulders. During the dance the head moves sideways, right and left. Defiance is shouted at the enemy, be it human, animal, or a supernatural spirit.

In the zar cult, the victory dance ("gurri") of the spirit just after he has entered the body of the possessed, is regarded so much as the "fukkara" type of dance, that the zar gives his identity away by his own version of "boasting" - whereupon the "disease" is diagnosed.

The hotu loyalty dance, by contrast, is a collective dance, most often a jump-dance, in which the multitude of warriors, brandishing their weapons, try to cast fear on the enemy by numbers, sound, and expression of intense loyalty to their common leader. The name itself is composed of "ho", onomatopoetic for shouting, "ta" signifying the collective suffix (all together). The following are common variations:

"Cho - cho" - simple shouting in unison, ("qärärto").

"Yebähalal Jeb-o" - "The hyena will swallow him (i.e. the enemy)."

"Wärdaw sheb-o" - "crow's beak" (i.e. the vultures will feed on the enemy).

"Addis Abäba" - (lit. "New Flower", name of capital) - shout of

828 imbecility - "leb defen" (lit. whose heart is stopped up).

828.201 Certain emotions are expressed by certain patterned physiological signals, often unconsciously:

Anger may be expressed unconsciously by biting the lower lip, or one's finger. Also by knitting the brow ("fir kosättälä"), from the painful expression that results from drinking the purgative drug kosso, so that a person who perpetually goes about with a frown is said to have a face "as if he had eaten kosso", a "kosso face" ("kosso fit"). Melancholy is expressed in a wrinkled facial expression ("fit chändadda").

The symbolic significance of the eye has been referred to in a number of connections. Timidity, and respect in the young, is expressed by "turning the eyes to the dust" ("ayn afar"). Impatience, by shifting the glance rapidly ("gäräramätä"), without making impatient body movements which would be "lower class". Directional signals may be consciously given ("ayn ataqqäsä") by eye movements already described; and observation out of the corner of one's eye ("ayn täqäräramäta") is [754] a finely developed Amhara subtlety. The sorcerer's eye ("yäsäw ayn" lit. "the man's eye," to avoid the sinister name of the "buda" evil spirit) is greatly feared; particularly when it stares and seems to pop ("ayn täqolaqqälä").

The "left" position is considered the embarassing side ("gera agäbba") (perhaps because the right side is always the honorable, because it would be embarrassing to place someone so that he would have to take food with the left hand which is used in the toilet). Left-handedness is extremely rare. When some undertaking turns out badly, the saying is "The matter has turned left" ("nägär gera honä").

827 Physiological functions carried out without repression are considered low-class and low-ethnic by the Amhara. Only a low-class

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

covers the Amhara home.* The latter is related to customs concerning adoption.

The adoption of children among traditional Amhara takes place through a ritual in which the child sucks the honey-dipped thumb of his intended foster parent. The latter thereby becomes the child's *ṭuṭ abbāt*, or breast-father. In some cases the child actually sucks the nipples of the *ṭuṭ abbāt*. Used metaphorically, the image of sucking someone's breast is employed to indicate becoming close to, or ingratiating oneself with, a superior; breast-feeding is so explicitly connected with emotional security that people are inclined to allude to it when finding a new source of security.

The Amhara's attachment to passive, pleasurable activities centering on the oral zone appears in a wide variety of forms. Manipulation of the lips is one of these. Amhara often stand about fingering their lips or rubbing them against some object, much as people in another culture might scratch their heads or stroke their chins. Children may be humored by having their lips played with by a relative. The frequent covering and uncovering of the mouth with a part of the toga, that is so characteristic of the Amhara, may be a sublimated form of this.

The lips are used in Amhara culture for a variety of expressive purposes. The Amhara identify persons and places, not by pointing with the finger or hand, but by distending the lips in a certain direction. Kissing, while seldom used for romantic purposes, serves a number of other expressive functions. Relatives or friends of either sex kiss each other on both cheeks after a long separation, the older or superior in status kissing first. Children and servants greet their superiors by kissing their feet, which they also do to show gratitude for some favor. One kisses one's own hands before extending them to receive a gift. Kissing one's fingers is done to signify an oath or a special appreciation of something, the meaning being "I swear by it."

Religious sentiment is typically expressed through kissing. The devout Amhara kisses his fingers and touches the table to show thanksgiving after a meal. The church is greeted by kissing a part of the building, and going to church is referred to as "kissing the church." Following devotional services the priest's cross is kissed by all present, and often the Holy Book is kissed as well. When the ark is brought outside on holidays, reverence is shown by falling to the ground and kissing the earth.

While, moreover, romantic kissing is an uncommon activity among the Amhara, Amharic literature at times represents this activity with poignant intensity. Thus, in an unwritten Amharic couplet one hears:

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* The Gurage, by contrast, place a straight stick atop their homes. So do the Amhara of Gojjam Province.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

ber of Amhara folk tales, moreover, have as their central theme the resolution of conflict or the attainment of mastery over the environment by means of eating something or presenting food to someone.[14] It is a theme conspicuous in the legend which celebrates the ascendance of the first of the Shoan Amhara emperors, Yekuno Amlāk (1270–85). According to *The Book of the Riches of Kings,* Yekuno Amlāk ate by chance the head of a rooster which had been set out for a king of the rival Zāgwē Dynasty:

> And this youth Yakuno Amlak found the head of the cock which the woman had left by the fire-place, and he took it and ate it, and it filled his belly, and it made him an exalted person and so mighty a man that he was superior to every other man of might, and it made his face to shine like the light of the sun, and his majesty filled all the other servants of the king with awe, and all the people feared him, and they marvelled at him, and they loved him exceedingly, and they placed him in their hearts, and they recognized that the grace of God was upon him, and they said, "What is the thing which hath come upon this young man?"[15]

Oral Sadism

In addition to subserving a passive, receptive mode of relating to the environment, preoccupation with the oral zone also figures in Amhara culture as the locus of a variety of aggressive modes of behavior and fantasy. Hostility is expressed by a number of oral gestures. Sticking out the tongue and spitting on the ground in front of somebody, for example, are two forms of non-verbal insult. Biting the lower lip is an indication of anger. Touching the tongue, and then forehead, chin, and cheeks, signifies "You just wait!" When fighting, men sometimes bite one another's ears. The activation of a strong biting impulse in situations of military combat is suggested by the following refrain from an Amhara martial declaration, recorded over a century ago:

> Oh brothers, you are hungry and thirsty! Oh true sons of my mother,
> Are you not birds of prey? Come on! There is the enemy's flesh.
> And I, I will be the rider to butcher for you! Forward,
> And if you lack hydromel, I will give you my blood to drink.[16]

The theme of cannibalism appears in various forms in the Amhara imagination. One of the common subjects of traditional Amhara painting is the story of the cannibal Balaya Sab. His name is in Ge'ez, and means "Eater of Men." The story about him derives from one of the old legends collected in *The Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*[17] Balaya Sab was a wicked man who fed on the flesh of humans. At his death he appeared before St. George, who measured his evil deeds against his good deeds on a large scale. On the side of evil deeds were placed the souls of all those he had eaten, so heavy a weight that the devil began to make ready to carry him off to hell. Then